

Early Fairbury Ice Cream Parlor Sponsored Men's Basketball Team

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William Jacob Braun was born in 1876 in Jacksonville, Illinois. His parents were Jacob P. Braun and Ann Elizabeth Long. When William was six years old, his family moved from Jacksonville to Fairbury. He attended the Fairbury city schools. After finishing his schooling, he worked at Wade's drug store.

Rufus Cullen Huntoon was born in 1880 in Pontiac, Illinois. His parents were Rufus Cullen Huntoon Sr. and Margaret Phelps. When Rufus was eight years old, his family moved to Fairbury. Rufus attended the Fairbury city schools. His parents noticed that Rufus was a natural musician. He taught himself the piano and played it at social events. Rufus soon had the nickname of Cully Huntoon.

In 1908, William was thirty-two years old, and Rufus was twenty-eight years old. They decided to go into business together. They opened the Bon Ton confectionery and soft drink parlor on June 5, 1908. Their building was at 108 East Locust. This building was later the Fairbury Paint Store for many years.

The new business ran an ad in the Blade newspaper in the September 9, 1909 edition. The advertisement noted the Bon Ton Ice Cream Parlor was the coolest and finest place in the city. The ad also stated the Bon Ton had soft drinks, crushed fruit, sundaes, sodas, fine candies, and good cigars.

In 1912, at the age of thirty-two, Rufus married Kate Eatherly Sutton. She was born in Pennsylvania. They had one child in 1919, Hugh Sutton Huntoon.

The Bon Ton often sponsored musical entertainment for its customers. In 1913, John McGreal, a baritone soloist, sang at the Bon Ton for one week.

In 1914, at the age of thirty-eight, William Braun married Gertrude May Foster. Gertrude was born in Pontiac. They had three children. Son William F. Braun was born in 1915, daughter Sarah Ann Braun in 1918, and son Frank R. Braun in 1922. Unfortunately, William Braun's wife died at age forty in 1926.

The two business partners decided to sponsor a traveling men's basketball team. A group of Bon Ton customers decided to celebrate the formation of the new team by breaking out their cigars. The cigar they happened to choose to smoke was called The Limit. Therefore, the team was named the Bon Ton Limits. The first season for the Limits was the 1910-1911 season. They played their home games upstairs in the Opera House located at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets.

In March of 1911, the Pantagraph recounted the Bon Ton Limits finished their first season with a record of 11-1. The lineup for the Bon Ton Limits on their last game of that season was Lyle Jenkins and Perry Keck as forwards, Wes Hanson was the center, and Jack Fugate and Sam Wade were the guards.

The opponents of the Bon Ton Limits included the Champaign Blues, the Gibson City Yours Truly, the New York Nationals, the Peoria Tigers, the Piper City Moguls, the Wilmington Seals, and the Chicago West Side Browns. In 1914, the Limits played a traveling team of girls called the Boston Bloomers.

The basketball court in the upper story of the Opera House was relatively small. There was only one row of chairs for fan seating. The rest of the spectators had to stand during the whole game. The games were so popular that many Fairbury young men wanted to take their dates to the games. These young men would hire kids to get to the Opera House as soon as it was open, and secure seats on the chairs. When the young man and his date would arrive for the game, the kids would give up their seats to the courting couple. The kids thought this arrangement was great. The kids made some money and got to watch the exciting games. In 1914, over 300 people saw the Bon Ton Limits defeat the Champaign Blues.

In subsequent years, other players joined the team. John Joda played for the Bon Ton Limits. He was later killed in World War I in France. The Fairbury American Legion post is named after John Joda. Carl Goudy also joined the team. Carl and his brother William became early motorcycle racers. Carl and his brother William were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998.

The basketball games were very physically rough with the players wearing large knee pads and elbow pads. As a game got heated, some players were forced into the coal chute opening or pushed down the stairs. Carl Goudy had the art of putting out his foot and gently nudging his opponent in the back and hurtling him to the floor down to perfection.

In one exciting game, the Limits were playing the Chicago West Side Browns. The score was close the entire game. Jack Fugate, the Limit's back guard, hardly ever took a shot at the basket. With just a few seconds left in the game, the Limit's were trailing the Browns by one point. The crowd was shouting for the Limits to take one last shot. Jack Fugate bent down with the ball between his legs and with an underhand sweep, let the ball fly the length of the court. Just before the end of the game gun sounded, Jack's shot went through the basket. The crowd went wild with jubilation.

Before the invention of modern refrigerators, the Bon Ton had to use ice to cool its ice cream and drinks. In 1925, the Bon Ton had their first iceless refrigerator installed, and it helped to keep their ice cream at the same temperature. The last mention of the Bon Ton Limits basketball team was the 1925 season. The team existed for about fourteen years.

In 1930, William Braun was fifty-four, and Cully Huntoon was fifty years of age. In August of 1930, they sold the Bon Ton business to Walt Somers. He continued to operate

the Bon Ton until 1937 when he sold it to Mr. A. J. Porter. The Bon Ton had been open for twenty-nine years.

Cully Huntoon died at age sixty-two in 1942. William Braun died in 1945 at age sixty-nine. Their ice cream parlor and their basketball team provided refreshments and exciting entertainment to many Fairbury citizens.

